

Part 2

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So you are having trouble with your handwriting

As the teacher you might think that this first page is inappropriate but it has a particular purpose. Whatever you say about pupils' work may be construed as criticism of their handwriting. Teenagers' handwriting, or anyone else's for that matter, for better or worse, is part of themselves. They may react strongly to it being criticised even though it is for their own good. It is important to break through the 'them and us' situation as quickly as possible.

It is only natural for a pupil to think 'I can read it why can't they'. To be fair, sometimes pupils cannot even decipher the teacher's message. What I am trying to do here is to put you in their place, to understand what they need to have explained and what preconceptions you may have to overcome.

The remarks below, made by various teachers are not exactly helpful. They do not explain what is needed and seem only to be expressing their own exasperation. This is understandable when faced with an illegible script. You must, however, be on the pupils' side, and somehow communicate that the trouble with their writing, whatever it is, is unlikely to be their fault, Either they have not been taught properly or there is something really wrong. They cannot diagnose their own problems, so it is your role to discover, with their help, what can be done.



So you are having trouble with your handwriting

untidy
can't
 Rewrite this more neatly. Write more neatly
illegible
 Could you decide on a style of handwriting?
 do this again
 What does this say!?

You can read it, why can't they?

Do people keep saying that they cannot read what you have written? Other people judge you by your writing but they look for individuality as well as neatness. Good writing must of course be legible but it should flow and have some character.

You do not need the same standard of handwriting all the time. It must be extra good if you are writing a special letter, but when you are writing a quick list for yourself it can be really rough. For note taking and examinations speed is the most important thing and for this you need an in-between standard.

Handwriting is for communicating, not only while you are at school, but for the rest of your life. If there are any real problems it is worth getting things right now.

This is how you can start

No one can force pupils to change anything about their handwriting. It must all come from them in the end. What you are going to try to alter are actual movements of the body – movements that have long been automated. You are also going to alter attitudes which may also be deeply ingrained and you have no idea who or what influenced the writer in the habits or tensions that are now showing.

The questions below are a good start. They focus the writers' attention on their own habits and problems in a non-confrontational way. You can discuss any or all of the points with the pupil. In this way you will both start with a better understanding of the issues involved – and of each other.

The collection of pens is a reminder of one of the best relaxing techniques for you to use. Collect as wide a variety of writing implements as possible. These will include different types of points and different widths, from the familiar biros to fibre tips and gel pens. This gives a choice of the many free flowing pen points. Then you need a wide variety of handles – thick ones, thin ones, long ones, short ones and unusual angled ones like the new Yoropen. Let the pupils try them, perhaps just writing their name with each one. They can then choose to write with the one they find most comfortable and suited to their script. Occasionally this will, in itself, provide a solution to their problem. It is always an interesting exercise and usually shows how the writing will improve as the writer relaxes into an enjoyable and probably unexpected exercise.



This is how you can start

Some so-called handwriting problems have little to do with the letters themselves. Your attitude to your handwriting, the way you use your body, and any other problems with your school work will also affect how you write

It is simplest to consider your letters first. If someone explains what might be wrong with the way your letters are formed you may be able to deal with that by yourself. There are pages like this one called 'Spot your own mistakes'. Some of you may find them useful. You yourself must be convinced that change is necessary, and want to make the appropriate alterations. It is up to you in the end.

Handwriting needs to be automatic to leave your mind free to think about other things. You want to concentrate on what you are writing, not what your hand is doing. To get to this level you need proper training. If you've missed out earlier on, this gives you another chance. Half the problem is understanding what is wrong. Putting it right may be easier than you think.

First, ask yourself these questions

Is my handwriting worse under pressure?

Does it hurt to write?

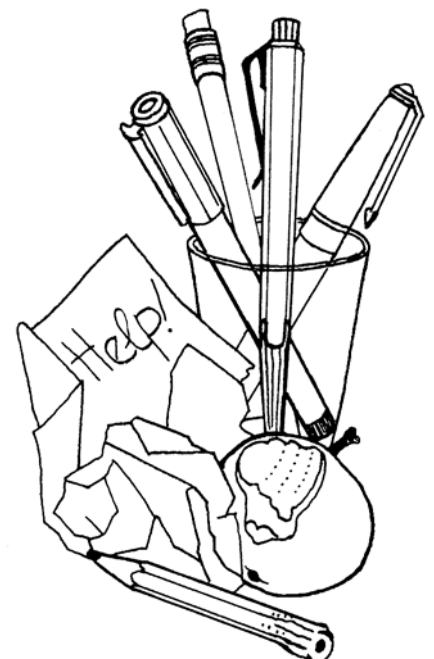
Is it so slow that I never get enough done?

Is it so fast that it looks sloppy?

Is it just *my* writing that is bad? What about other people's?

Is it worth all the effort to improve things?

Ask yourself these questions again when you have dealt with your problems.



Before you even start to write

This page again focuses the writers' attention on how they write. Before suggesting solutions this offers a list of questions for pupils to ask themselves. It sets the scene for you to offer help – but be sure that your advice is really helpful. Read the pages 20 and 21 concerning observation first so that you have an understanding of the issues involved. Your attitude must always be concerned with what benefits the writer. There is no exact right or wrong about any aspect of handwriting. Anything of concern, or disagreement for that matter, can be settled through discussion.

This is the time to consider any unusual postures and if appropriate to question (very sensitively) to try and find out if this might be a cause for an atypical posture or paper position. Observation of a variety of pupils will begin to give you a feeling for the different causes. Maybe no one has ever suggested a change of paper position to them, or asked them whether they have an aching hand or back. This is also an ideal moment to investigate other issues such as whether a pupil can see the board from every position in the classroom – or check that he or she can hear the teacher. Although these issues are outside handwriting problems they are at the very centre of consideration for the pupil.

Occasionally, a pupil will not enjoy, or may not be willing to see the relevance of, this stage of questioning. In this case change to the letterform aspect on page 36 onwards and come back to these pages later on.



Before you even start to write

It really helps if:

- 1 You can see what you are doing.
- 2 Your desk is the right height for you.
- 3 Your desk has a good surface.
- 4 Your paper is in the best position for you.
- 5 Your pen suits both your hand and your writing.
- 6 You hold your pen in a way that lets your fingers move freely.
- 7 You try to keep your desk clear and tidy.



Chair too low. Shoulders hunched.
Hand twists so you can see to write



Two cushions. Comfortable height.
Hand straightens. Writing can flow.



Correct desk height. Arms supported.
Shoulders relaxed. Writing improves.

What to do about it and why

It is quite likely that you will have little influence on what happens in general classrooms, such as specifying the size of furniture or the lighting in any particular room. You can, however, help to ensure that the individual pupils that you are helping as a special needs teacher, or whole class that you may be addressing, know the optimum conditions for working. In the end the onus will have to be on them to influence their own working conditions in school and in their working lives.

If you are working with individuals you may be able to demonstrate how alterations in quite simple things can make a big difference to the standard and comfort of writing. You could arrange to fit the chair and desk height to individuals. Then at least they will experience the effects of an optimum position. Even in countries that supply adjustable desks, these are of minimal use in schools where pupils are constantly changing classrooms – individually that is a different matter.

Rough work tops, of the type that are often found in science labs, can cause havoc with handwriting. To solve this problem, place a pad of paper under the writing sheet. This is also effective when working on hard shiny surfaces. At the same time give pupils the opportunity to write on a slanting surface. Special writing slopes are available commercially and should be in every special needs unit. It is quite easy for individuals to make use of something unobtrusive once they experience the benefit of support for the whole arm. A ring binder with the flap part away from the body gives quite a bit of support. Pen hold and paper position are dealt with in detail between pages 26 and 30.



What to do about it and why

- 1 If you are right handed, try to have the light coming from the left. If you are left handed have the light coming from your right or you'll be working in the shadow of your hand.
- 2 Make sure that you sit comfortably. If your chair is too low you will be hunched up, with your chin almost on the desk. If your chair is too high or the table is too low, then you may end up sitting sideways because there is no room for your legs.
- 3 Rough desks leave dents in the paper and make your writing jerky. Plastic desks are often too hard. Write on a pad of paper or rest on something that will give slightly.
- 4 If you are right handed, your paper should always be to your right side. If you are left-handed it should be over to your left. This lets your arms move freely as you write and stops you twisting your wrist to see what you are writing. Once the paper is over to the correct side you can slant it to suit yourself.
- 5 Experiment with different types of pens to find out how they affect your writing and your comfort.
- 6 Ask to see the pages 26 to 30 for information about pen hold.
- 7 If there is too much junk piled up on your desk, you may find yourself twisted over to one side because that is the only flat space for your paper. Remember, a right hander will need space to the right and a left hander to the left.



This table is too low and the chair too small. Sitting sideways is bad for handwriting.

If you do not believe all this, do the opposite. See how it feels and what it does to your writing.

Pen holds

Pen holds are one of the most emotive and least understood issues in the classroom as well as in the home. Writers are unfairly criticised and pen holds blamed for poor handwriting, but the blame lies elsewhere. All was well when everyone used conventional pencils and pens. At least everyone knew approximately the best way to hold them. The trouble started with the advent of ballpoints and other kinds of modern pens. They are practical and a vital part of modern life, but no one seemed to anticipate the trouble that would be caused by their having to be held at different elevations in order to work properly. They do not perform at the low slant that a pencil did. The most usual way to get them upright is either to exert more pressure on one side with one or two fingers, or for the thumb to push harder. This usually results in forcing it to slide further across the handle.

Unconventional holds start early as most infants use felt tipped pens before they come to school, seldom coloured pencils. As the felt tips get worn they have to be held in an ever more upright position. The muscles adapt easily at this early stage and the child becomes accustomed to whichever method works well. Afterwards it becomes increasingly hard to alter – and often seems unnecessary. The best way for you, the teacher, to understand, is to try these slight alterations in the finger positions yourself and experience the differences they make. The harder you press the more the pen come upright.

The three questions that are posed here are important because the motivation to alter an unconventional pen hold, must come from the writer. Discuss them first.



Pen holds

The way you hold your pen affects your handwriting more than you realise. It can make the difference between an aching hand and trouble-free writing. Ask yourself these questions.

- 1 Does it hurt me to write for any length of time?
- 2 Can I write as fast as I want to?
- 3 Does the way I hold my pen distort my letters or restrict my movements?

If the answer to any of these is 'yes', then read on.

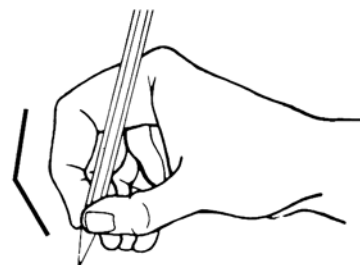
The conventional way of holding a pen is called a tripod grip. You put your thumb and first finger gently on either side of the pen and your middle finger underneath. This way everything can move freely as you write. If you have a problem you must look at each part of your grip separately: your finger position, your hand position and your wrist. Let us start with the fingers.

Try these different finger positions.

It even makes a difference which finger is nearest the pen point. When the first finger is in front you can make the quick changes of direction that you need in writing. When the thumb is in front you have less control over the pen. You may end up with an awkward handwriting, or a nasty lump where the pen is pressed down on your middle finger. As your thumb goes forward your first finger gets forced up at a sharp angle. This can be painful.



Forefinger in front.



Thumb and finger equal.



Thumb in front.

Hand positions

It is not only the fingers that influence the pen hold and consequent writing but the position of the hand (the rotation of the wrist). The two positions illustrated below both work well. Many artistic people adopt the on edge hand position automatically. This position produces a forward slant to written letters whereas a slightly flattened hand results in a more upright script. Try it yourself.

It is only when the wrist becomes excessively on edge so that it twists the hand that it may become painful. This tends to occur when left handers find that they cannot see what they have written. The solution then is to move the paper further over to the writer's left. This does not automatically solve the trouble when some writers may have with altering their hand position. They may have become so used to it. The best motivation for change comes when writing becomes painful. Some left handers also alter spontaneously when they find that when their wrist is twisted so their hand comes from above the line they cannot speed up their writing.

Discuss all these ideas and show the illustrations on pages 26-30. Also try to replicate some of your pupils' pen holds. In this way you will understand that you would find it hard to alter the way you hold your pen just as they do,

Hand positions

Do you write with your hand on edge, or is it slightly flattened? The 'hand on edge' way works well if you are relaxed but can cause trouble if you are tense. Under pressure you can tip your hand too far over so your wrist twists. This can hurt. Flatten your hand a little, so that your wrist straightens automatically. This soon stops the pain. Do not go to the other extreme and flatten your hand too much or you will make another set of muscles ache.

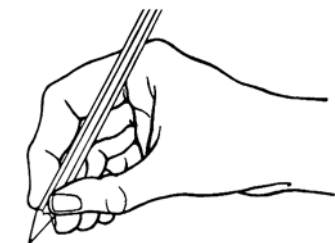
The tripod grip works well with a pencil or a fountain pen but not always so well with modern pens. They have to be held more upright to work well. This may be why so many people have unconventional pen holds. Some work quite well. There is an alternative penhold that helps to cure pain and writers cramp. Ask to see the illustration (no7) on page 29. If your pen hold is causing you trouble you must do something about it. First find which part of your hand or arm is strained. Experiment with different positions until your whole hand can relax and move freely.

It may take a while to get your muscles used to a new writing position. Start with some of the relaxing scribbles on page 33 before you try long sentences.

When you alter your hand or finger position the slant or proportions of your writing can change. Alternatively if you want to change the slant of your writing play around with your hand position or pen hold.



Hand on edge.



Hand slightly flattened.

Unconventional pen holds – left hand

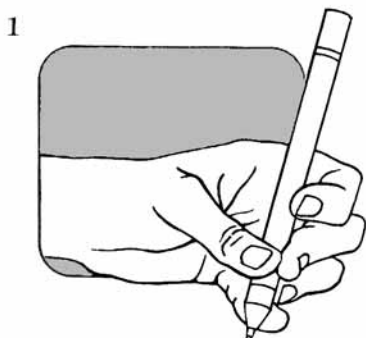
All these drawings were taken from actual photographs and give an idea of some of the different strategies that people adopt. Some work quite well but others do not. The result of no 1 can be seen on page 31. This boy could manage quite well at primary school and saw no reason to alter. Later on his attempts at fast writing invited so much criticism as well as intense pain in his hand and neck that he agreed to change his paper position and try a different hand position and pen hold. He never looked back. No 2 has a twisted wrist (inverted position) and two fingers on the handle of the pen. These factors combined are not too helpful but maybe the two finger hold is an indication of long fingers, which in themselves can cause problems. No 3 is also slightly inverted but obviously relaxed, and probably adopted this position to allow his writing to slant forwards. Over goes the thumb, but it is allowing the pen to be upright. No 4 shown on page 30 allowed so little free movement that it resulted in a small, restricted script. It can work but often is slow and can be painful. No 5, with the thumb right over the handle, would result in less control over fine movements but the writer would not have much motivation to change. No 6 looks complicated but might well work quite well for the writer,

Notice that most of the left handers' pens slant in a different direction to the right handers. That in turn will affect the slant of their handwriting. It is difficult for left handers to have forward slanting script.



Unconventional Pen holds – Left Hand

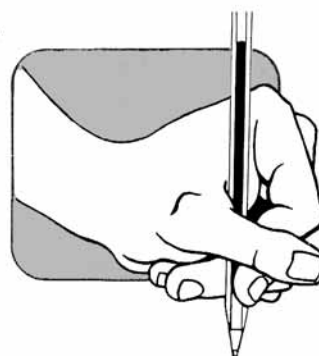
left handers try to solve their special problems, but do not always succeed.



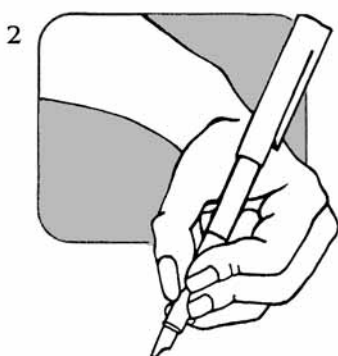
1 Bad. This restricts and can hurt.



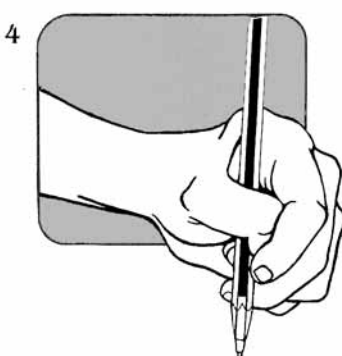
3 OK when relaxed. Lets the pen slant.



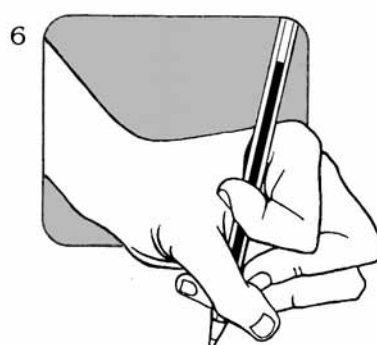
5 Less control if thumb does not work.



2 Awkward. Can slow you down.



4 Bad. The fingers cannot move freely.



6 Complicated. Restricts movement.

Unconventional pen holds – right handers

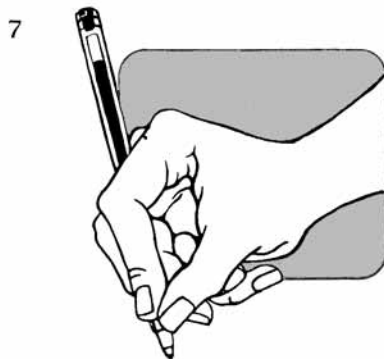
No 7 may look unconventional but is an excellent pen hold. The pen is held between the index and middle finger so there is never the pressure that causes a callus and pain. By freeing the fingers it lets writing flow more easily. It should be recommended for anyone who is suffering from pain or tension, but it is disliked by those who are very conventional. It is also useful for those with long fingers. See the example on no 8 may appear conventional but the angle of finger and thumb indicate a tense and painful pen hold, therefore probably a tense writer as well. No 9 has two fingers on the pen but this time the fingers are not synchronised. This may be caused by long fingers but may be slowing the writer down. It would probably be difficult to alter. No 10 looks complicated but may work quite well so beware of criticising it. Observe how the thumb of no 11 is pushing the pen. This will not work well but the writer, I suspect, would be unwilling to alter unless, or more likely, until, it hurts her. No 12 is an example of what you can learn. When questioned as to why she had adopted this complex pen hold (a useful technique), this girl looked at her hand in amazement. She exclaimed that she started holding the pen that way when she broke her finger and could not think why she was still doing it – but she had got used to it and it worked well.

So, observe and question and maybe help the writer to find something more effective – but only if necessary. By now you will be realising that possibly the pupils will be no more likely to be able to hold their pen like you do, than you are likely to hold yours like they do theirs.

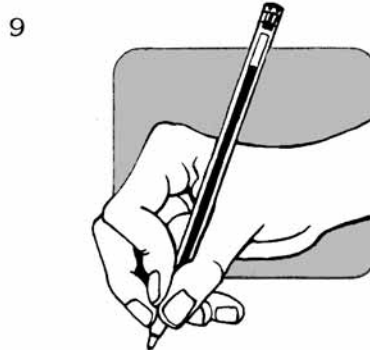


Unconventional Pen holds – Right Hand

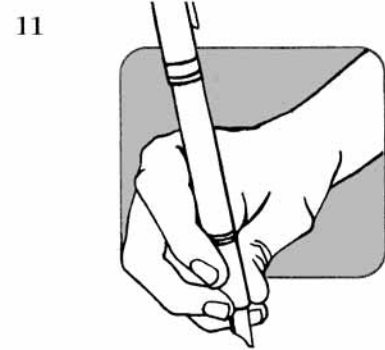
You need to try out these pen holds to feel why some work and others do not



Excellent. Try this alternative.



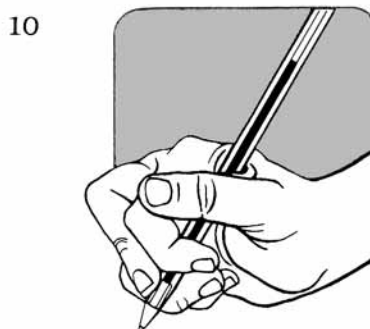
Two fingers can slow you down.



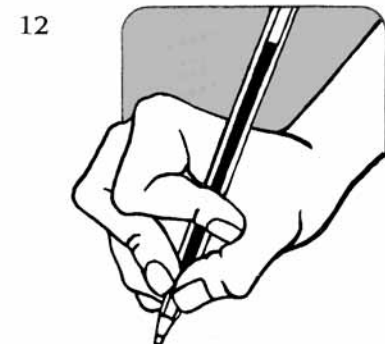
Awkward. Straighten your wrist.



Tense and painful. Relax.



Complex and rather limiting.



Looks strange but probably works.

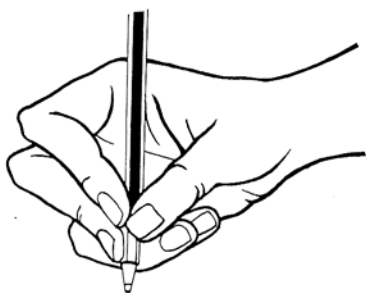
Your hand and your handwriting

The way you hold your pen affects your writing for better or worse. In many cases there is neither the need nor desire to change, but these few illustrations help to show when intervention might succeed. The first writer, an art student, was dismayed by her immature script. Much of her difficulty was caused by her long fingers. In order to fit onto the pen she had a stiff two finger pen hold. Long fingers can often be the cause pain when writing. The second picture shows how changing to the alternative pen hold had immediate effect. Her fingers could relax and straighten out and her writing altered to a free flowing, forward slanting script – all in five minutes. It is not always so easy!

The other writer shown below did not come to me for advice – I sat opposite to this university student on a train and asked to take a picture of her pen hold. I doubt whether she would have taken kindly to change. Pen hold, like every other aspect of handwriting, is an indicator. Looking at her bitten nails and this extremely tense hold adopted to give maximum control, she gave the impression of a tense and insecure person. This pen hold, at least, succeeded in getting the ballpoint upright but the effect on the handwriting was only too obvious. The limited movement allowed by the way the pen was held made the script almost indecipherable. If attempted, the alternative pen hold usually works well for left handers and allows a clear line of sight to the written words. Not all writers will be willing to experiment with it and I suspect that this writer would be one of those who would refuse.

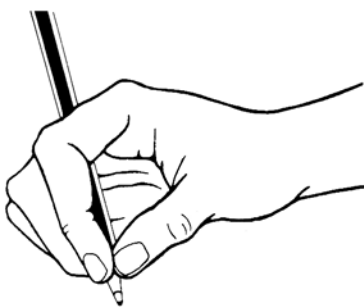
Your hand and your handwriting

The way you hold your pen affects your letterforms. Your whole hand as well as your fingers need to move freely to produce all the different strokes. Your pen hold should be relaxed to let you write fast and painlessly. Change pen hold, for whatever reason and you will probably alter the shape and slant of your letters.



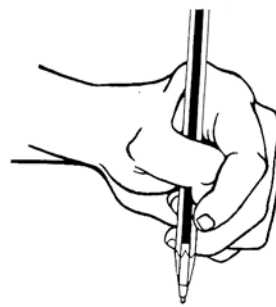
This is the way I used to v
This is the way I used to wri
This is the way I used to
This is the way I used to
Hundreds of people writing

This is a tense pen hold. The hand is on edge with two fingers stiffly on the pen. The hand cannot move freely enough to make joining strokes. A slow, rather childish printing is the result. Write like this for long and it will hurt.



can write faster
there is so little pressure
on my fingers

A complete change of pen hold gave immediate relief. The hand is slightly flattened, the fingers relaxed, and the writing now flows. This unconventional but efficient pen hold is specially good for those with long fingers.



any someone
could unique
can take work
up the will
writing the ball

This pen hold is bad. It does not let the fingers move. The limited movement shows in the writing. The hand pushes along the line but cannot go up and down, so there is hardly any difference between the tall and short strokes.

Paper position affects how you sit and what you write

If you only had the written sample to look at it would be difficult to work out what had caused the strung out handwriting in the first example below. That is why it is so important to see the writer in action. It is also an example of how difficult it is to self diagnose, or surely this boy would have realised what was wrong. To any one watching it is obvious that his paper is in the wrong position and needs moving. He is right handed and the paper is way out to his left so he had to move his hand over order to see the next letter. In doing so he kept the pen on the paper. A change of paper position solved those extended top joins.

The central pen hold was illustrated on the page 29 but here it is shown with the boy's handwriting. No wonder he faced criticism. This sample was once shown to an eminent psychologist who announced that the writer suffered from a severe neurological complaint. Without seeing the writer in action a diagnosis can be quite wrong. His whole posture is not illustrated, but the strain of twisting his head to try and see what he was writing was causing severe headaches. A change of paper position allowed his hand to untwist, and a short time later he was unable to return to the painful position that was wrecking his comfort and his work – hence a 'before' but no 'after' illustration.

As a right hander in the last illustration, there is no obvious reason for the inverted (twisted) hand position. Look at what it is doing to the boy's thumb. In this case he was having to follow an italic model which did not suit him. Maybe this was the reason. He would not consider altering the way he was writing. At times like this all you can do is to make suggestions and hope that when or if he starts to experience pain he would remember what you said and do something about it.

Paper position affects how you sit and what you write

Where you place the paper is vital. It influences how you sit, hold the pen and, in the end, what you write. Alter the paper position if it makes you sit awkwardly - left handers more to their left and right handers to their right. Arm muscles and even those in your back are used in writing. They must learn to work together in a new position. It may feel odd at first.



Birds
goes an
order:
Primate

The paper is over the wrong side. The writer sits badly and cannot see what he is doing. Letters, specially those that join at the top, spread out as he pulls his hand across to make sure he has written the right thing.



people hate to drive
bone-shakes, long
because I'm year all
by car, things are

Some strokes are almost impossible to form with this pen hold. Change it or you will have awkward writing. left handers need the paper over to the left so they do not have to twist the wrist to see what they are doing.



and bill. Dumptier
high pitched, Kocute
roaring sound on
birds of prey.
habitually dives

Some right handers also twist the wrist and push with the thumb. Once again the result is awkward jerky writing and an aching hand. Correct paper position will avoid this unnecessary trouble.

Relax and your handwriting will improve

This is one of the most intractable, yet commonest problems that you have to deal with. Tension is the greatest distorter of handwriting. The typical uneven or jagged script often appears unsightly but signals a need for understanding not criticism. You may suspect the source of the tension, whether at school or at home, but you have little control over it. In some cases it may not even be advisable to investigate that aspect too deeply. In others the pupil will be desperately in need of a sympathetic teacher to help them out of some trouble – and you may well be shocked by some of their revelations.

You will soon recognise the signs of tension. Then by some means you need to get the person in front of you gradually to relax. In that way both of you will soon be able to see the subtle changes in handwriting. The exercise suggested on page 23 which involves choosing a pen and name writing is useful in these circumstances. Look at the hunched shoulders pictured below. They all seem to suggest tension. If you walk behind your pupils' chairs you will get another view of those who need to relax.

None of this solves the causes of tension. What it does do is to show the writer that when he or she relaxes many of the visible problems disappear. At least pupils then have proof that when they are happy and in a relaxed environment their handwriting is acceptable. You have little influence over what happens in other situations and may feel it advisable to tell pupils that their writing may again deteriorate under stress.



Relax and your handwriting will improve

There is tension in all our lives, at home and at school. When the stress gets really bad, this will show in your writing. Then you may be criticised for bad writing or untidiness. You may grip your pen so hard that it hurts you to write. You may be pressing too hard on the paper that your letters go through several sheets. Your hand can look quite relaxed, but tension can be stiffening your arm or shoulder. The way you sit can make your muscles tense, or tension itself can make you sit awkwardly. You may sometimes be so worried, angry or frustrated that neither your thoughts nor your writing can flow freely. It is all connected.

You cannot get rid of all the worry and tension in your life, but you can learn to relax when writing.

- 1 Sit with your back straight. Relax your hand and arm.
- 2 Uncross your legs. Relax your hunched shoulders.
- 3 Shake your hand until it feels floppy. Take a couple of deep breaths.



Stiff neck and shoulders are the result if you sit badly. These three all need to move the paper - left handers to their left, right handers to the right, to relax.

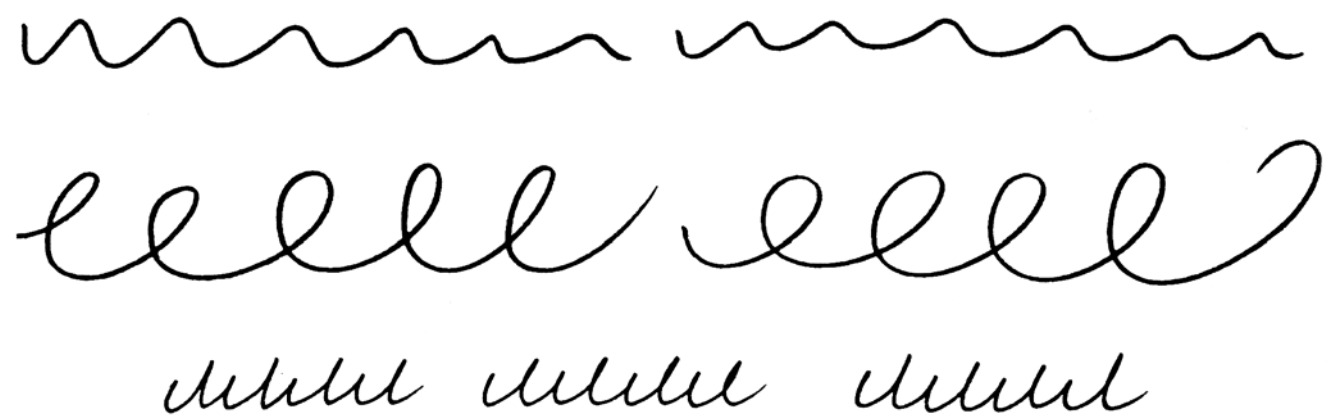
Relaxing scribbles

These relaxing scribbles mimic the movement of handwriting. They take away any problems of producing actual letters and allow the writer to feel how smooth the act of writing could feel. These scribbles are useful when writers are testing a different pen or an altered pen hold that might feel too unfamiliar. It could put them off at first, but the scribbles are an ideal way of getting used to something new.

If a pupil's problem manifests itself through too much pressure on the page, then you can turn over the paper and feel a lessening of the indentations on the back as the writer relaxes. As you can see the three scribbles get progressively more controlled. The bottom one provides a quick but very useful glimpse into your pupil's character and possible difficulties. This is illustrated on page 72.

Relaxing scribbles

Try these relaxing scribbles. They make you loosen up and realise that you can write this way all the time. You can learn a lot about your writing problems by looking closely at your own efforts. Do them until your pen is skimming across the page. This how it should feel when you are writing.



Can you do both the rounded movements and the joining strokes between the long and short lines? Do you hesitate anywhere? If so try changing your pen hold to help your fingers move more freely.

Do you feel that your pen is holding you up, perhaps not moving as smoothly as it ought? If so, it is time you used a more flowing point. What about trying a fibre-tip or gel pen?

When you started did you press so hard that you could feel the bumpy shapes through the back of the paper? If so, you are using too much force. You do not need to keep turning over the paper to check whether you are improving as you relax. As you put less pressure on the pen the lines get fainter.

Practical tips for left handers

It might help you to understand the practical problems if you try to write with your left hand (presuming you are right handed). The effects will be pretty wild but at least you will have a better understanding of the practical difficulties. Sometimes the only thing you can do is to set up the optimum conditions for individuals to let them feel and see if it suits them better. The sad truth is that it is still a right handed world and with handwriting, like so many things, they may have to find their own ways of surviving. The list below can only alert them to some of the issues involved. Discuss these issues as well, and between you, you might come up with some useful suggestions for the whole school.

A few left handers write with their left hand but have a right leading eye. That is described as being cross lateral. Their paper position will have to be a compromise between the needs of hand and the eye. The more complex problems of directionality and difficulties with specific letters and joins are explained on pages 9-10 and page 47.



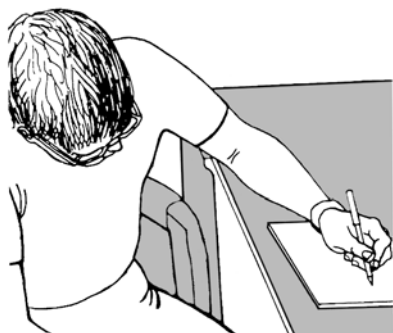
The Yoropen's angle helps left handers because it allows them to see what they have just written.



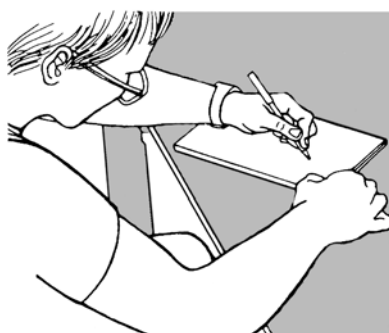
Practical tips for left handers

Left handers have different needs from right handers and these are often overlooked.

- 1 Sit at the end of the table, or next to a left hander. You need space to your left side. If you sit to the right of a right hander, you will bump each other as you work.
- 2 Find a seat where the strong light comes from your right side, otherwise you will be working in the shade of your own hand.
- 3 Sit a little higher than your right handed neighbour. This will help you to see over the top of your hand as you write. Hold your pen a fair distance from the point to help you to see what you are writing.
- 4 Paper position is very important. Put the paper to your left side before you start to slant it. Your arm can move freely. You see what you are doing without smudging.
- 5 A pen with a smooth point will work best for you. Sharp points dig into the paper and broad edged nibs can be a problem. Fibre tips are good and do not smudge.
- 6 Some strokes are more difficult for a left hander. You may want to use slightly different letters from a right hander, or sequence your strokes differently. See page 47.



This left hander had his paper over to his right side, so he sat sideways to write.



Now the paper is in the over to his left he can sit properly at the desk.



He tried working on a tilted board and liked it. You might like it too.

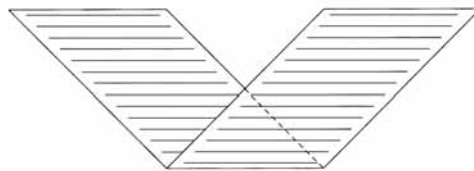
Hand positions for left handers

The strategies that some pupils have adopted may appear strange and uncomfortable to you but may work quite well for individuals. Questioning may reveal why that particular posture has been adopted. This may add to your understanding but as far as intervention goes the same rules apply as on page..

Does it hurt? Does it slow down the writer? Is it distorting any letters or strokes?

Like everything else about handwriting hand postures can form early in school life, quite unconsciously. They are influenced by various factors, paper position being perhaps the most important. If children have enough space and are helped to place their paper to their left then maybe all will be well. If not they develop their hand position around their paper, such as twisting their wrist above the line of writing. The way they slant the paper as the arm gets longer and needs more space may result, sometimes quite markedly, in writing upwards or downwards on the paper.

This illustration shows that the angle of the paper determines whether you write upwards or downwards



Hand positions for left handers

When it comes to holding a pen, there seem to be three main hand positions that left handers choose.

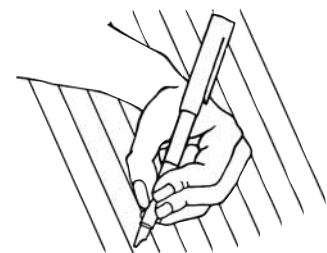
- 1 Over the top sometimes called inverted. The wrist is twisted right round so that the pen comes down from above the line of letters. If you want to change from this position first move the paper over to your left then flatten your hand slightly.

Advantages

You can see what you are doing. You do not smudge your work. You can make your letters slant forward easily.

Disadvantages

It is awkward and can hurt you. It may slow your writing down. It is difficult to make an undercurve or joining stroke.

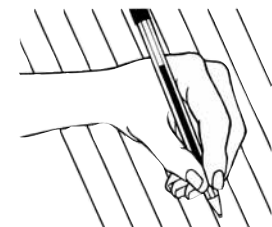


This hand is twisted so the pen comes from above the line of writing.

- 2 From the side. Provided you make your fingers work and do not push the pen with your whole hand, this can be an effective way to write. Notice the way the paper can slant.

Advantages

You can see what you have just written. You do not smudge. Letters are usually upright.



This hand comes in from the side

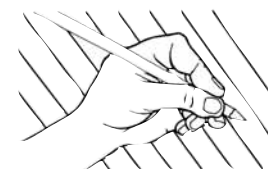
- 3 From below. Provided you slant your paper and have it well to your left, you should see what you have just written.

Advantages

Your fingers probably move more freely with less pushing. It is easier to join up and lets the writing flow. You are less likely to be criticised.

Disadvantages

Your writing may slope backwards.



This hand comes from below the writing.

Handwriting is a pattern

The fact that handwriting is a pattern is greatly to everyone's advantage when it comes to teaching in the first place or correcting later on. Pay no attention to people who say that you cannot change the way pupils form their letters when they get to secondary school. You cannot force anyone to alter any of their letters that have the wrong movement, but you can persuade them that it is to their benefit. That is done by demonstrating that by getting the movement right their hand will move more smoothly, that letters can then join and it will be quicker and more efficient.

Pupils must be able to feel this as well as see this. The easiest way is by using a pattern of letters from the same family as the faulty one

For instance for the frequently wrongly formed 'd' try: *cd cd cd*

For 'a' or 'g' try *ca ca ca* for 'g' try *cg cg cg* then *adadad* which is a bit harder

For 'n', 'm', and 'r' when they are written without the first stroke:

hnhnhn hmhmhm hrhrhr progressing to *nrnrnr* and *mrmrnr*

Try it first in separate letters before embarking on joined up then words using the same family of letters. You can apply the same principle to any letters finding a suitable partner with the same movement within the same family. See also the opposite page.



Handwriting is a pattern

Think of written letters as a pattern made up of very few strokes. There are long and short straight strokes, diagonal ones and rounded ones. That leaves only dots and crosses on the letters 'i', 'j', 'f' and 't'.

Putting letters in family groups

You can separate letters into those using the same strokes and deal with them in family groups. But remember it is meant to be a moving pattern.

It is important to start at the right place and write the strokes in the correct direction. Then when the letters join up they make an understandable pattern.

iltj are made up of straight strokes.

uy have under arches.

hnmrpbk have a downstroke followed by an arch.

cadgqoe are all based on 'c' and 'e', even though they start further round.

vw xz have diagonal strokes and so does this 'k'.

fs go further because they start like 'c' then change direction.

All letters start at the top except 'e' and 'd'. This is a useful tip.

If the pattern is wrong ...

It is not only that letters with an incorrect movement make joined letters almost impossible to read but they often stop the writer from joining up at all. In the script below the only letter that joins is the incorrectly formed 'd'. If you wanted to impress on pupils how inefficiently the hand would move in this case, enlarge the sample and let them trace it with their own hand. By replicating the movement they will be able to feel how jerky and odd it feels. It takes the sting out of correcting their own writing and brings home the message without any tension.

If you were going to correct this boy (or any other pupil) you could start by looking for a letter with the correct movement. In this case the 'a' and the 'g' work well, so you could say that at least he has got two of the most difficult letters right and then go on to the rest of that family and deal with the 'd' and the 'o' which appears to go round the wrong way. He needs almost every pattern exercise:

bh bh bh and probably **bhp bhp bhp** even though 'p' does not appear in this sample.

His 'y' looks all right so **yu yu yu** will help and of course **hmn hmn hmn**

It would be a long job and it is hard to understand how this problem could have been left so long. It may come down to this feeling that you cannot change the letters of older pupils. This is just not true and you must try. You are probably the pupil's last chance.



If the pattern is wrong ...

Wrongly formed letters can make joined up writing almost impossible to read. A smoothly flowing movement leads to a more efficient handwriting and is less strain on your hand.

a young man F1ND OUT ABOUT MURDER AND UNDER

Many of these letters are wrongly formed. They must be corrected before they can join properly.

1 Starting at the wrong place

o leads to *oo* instead of *oo*
d leads to *ded* instead of *ded*

2 Going round the wrong way

o leads to *oo* instead of *oo*
g leads to *go* instead of *go*

3 Leaving strokes out

m leads to *hm* instead of *him*
r leads to *art* instead of *art*

4 Adding strokes on

u leads to *uin* instead of *win*
v leads to *eue* instead of *eve*

Check the points on these pages against your own writing or get a couple of friends to do it for you.

Alternatives and other families

Handwriting models differ even within this country and with a mobile population you will be faced with a variety of letterforms. It is not a good idea to make pupils change from the style that they have been taught. Should they, however, have movement problems that need correcting just bear in mind that some letters may have to move into another family so will need a different letter to partner them.

For those who have problems with the heights of letters it may be enough for them to have the alphabet demonstrated in the groups shown below. In addition they will benefit from an explanation as to why the height differentials are so important. The different heights define the shape of the word. Their handwriting may be just about legible while slow and deliberate but when they have to speed up the conventional ascenders and descenders are vital. If they need further help then exercises will mean writing first the separate groups – best on lined paper – then words with mixed heights.



Alternatives and other families

You may have learned other forms of certain letters. If so, your groups might be different.

b and *Ĵ* would go with *u y*. Rounded *v* and *w* might go with them.

You can use these letter groups to make your own exercises.

How to make up your own exercises:

If you have a faulty letter just find another in the same family that you can write correctly. Repeat them together a few times. The right one will help the wrong one to move correctly.

Grouping letters by height:

b d f h k l go above the line of writing.

f g j p q y go above and below the line of writing.

a c e i m n o r s u v̇ w x z do not go up or down.

t is taller than *i* but not as tall as *l*.

t f are a useful pair if you are having crossbar troubles.

If you are having trouble with heights of letters use these groups for your exercise.

If the letter heights are wrong ...

These samples illustrate typical faults in various styles. When you are writing out exercises for a pupil it is a good idea to keep approximately to their style and slant. As you can see each style seems to encourage different faults. The first one seems to be joining up before he has got the right idea about the different heights of letters. The exercises for this pupil will need to be in separate letters before he goes back to joins – and even then it might be better if he did not join from ascending letters.

The next sample illustrates the particular faults that might arise from a style with this 'f', 'b' and open 'p'. The sample that slopes backwards came from a left hander. It illustrates that as 'f' is the only letter that can both ascend and descend, if written as a long letter it can be simplified to a straight line.

Twelve rules of legibility

As handwriting matures and speed forces some modifications, letters need no longer be written absolutely perfectly. Words like 'must look' and 'be indicated' are used rather than 'must be' or 'must appear' over the page. These words reflect the realities of mature scripts. The twelve rules on illustrated page 40 are showing what liberties you can take and get away with, and what you cannot – and what happens when you go too far.



If the letter heights are wrong ...

Make letters the right height or your writing will be difficult to read.

hnty

hill will
here were

This says 'hill will' and 'here were'. The short 'h' and bad joins from the 'w' muddle the words.

hill will
here were

These sequences help to correct the letter heights

hope enjoy escape

Here the letters that should go below the line cause the trouble.

joyo lylp

be fit for a bit of painting

This says 'be fit for a bit of painting' but the letter 'f' is too short and can get confused with the open 'b'. The open 'p' is too short. It looks like a letter 'n'.

bf pn or bf pn

shown for me to

You can simplify the letter 'f' but it must go below the line or it looks like a 't'. See the short 'h'.

ff ff for to

specialy behap gratefn

'f' and 'l' are too short. A stroke left off the 'u' in 'grateful' makes matters worse.

ulll eful

12 rules of legibility

These points apply to separate letters as well as joined up letters.

- 1 Letters must be the correct height in relation to each other.

after class not aster class

- 2 Letters meant to be closed must look closed.

ing an not ingy an

- 3 Letters that are meant to be open must look open.

hay out not bay out

- 4 Straight strokes must look straight.

all living not alliving
bit is not bit is

- 5 Curved strokes must look curved.

ice not iie

- 6 Parts of letters meant to be joined together must be joined.

backs not badrs
pack not padc

- 7 Loops and arches must appear, also crossbars and dots on 'i'.

The who not The Ho

- 8 Overcurves and undercurves must differ.

hum not hum
or huuu

- 9 Space letters so that it is clear where one letter ends and the next begins.

aging bat not agng bat

These points apply to joined up letters

- 10 Finish one letter before starting the next.

was we not was we

- 11 The joining stroke must be indicated or space left to show where one letter ends and the next begins.

her hair not her hair

- 12 The joining must not distort a letter so that it looks like another, or suggest an extra letter.

give way not give way

Why and when to join up

Recently the fashion has been to encourage children in junior schools to join up every letter in every word. However, as ever longer words get used all that happens is that letters can become distorted and hands can begin to ache. This is because we have to rest the whole of our hand on the writing surface in order to control modern implements. We need to take pen lifts during long words. In the days when quills were used and continuous copperplate was written, the hand was balanced precariously on the little finger only. Joining up is only going from where you finish one letter to where you start the next. When you lift the pen exactly the same movement takes place in the air instead of on the paper, therefore it wastes little time or energy.

The phrase join when comfortable is important. You may find just as many problems with pupils who join too much as with those who do not join enough. Often the trouble is evident when less competent writers join from descenders. These strokes tend to distort the pattern of the writing.

The reasons listed here are useful for discussion. What is not mentioned is that pupils with severe problems may feel safer with separate letters until their other difficulties are sorted out. There is always the other side of the argument. For some conditions, children with tremors for instance, it is repositioning that is difficult. Within reason, they will find joined up works better for them.



Why and when to join up

Reasons for joining once you're used to it:

- 1 It is usually faster.
- 2 It is more mature.
- 3 It helps the flow of writing and this also makes it easier for your hand.
- 4 It spaces your writing as well as joining it.

Reasons against joining if you are not used to it:

- 1 Sometimes it is less legible
- 2 At first it may not be so neat.
- 3 It may be slower until you have practiced.

You do not need to join all your letters all the time. Your hand needs a rest, and a chance to move along the line too. Continuous joining of long words makes writing slower, not quicker. Start with the joins that come easiest to you and join when it is comfortable.

Simple joins have groups too

Letters that can join from the base *i l t u h m n a d c e k*

Letters that can join from the top *o r v w*

Letters that can join from the crossbar *f t*

Letters that can join with loops at speed *f g j y q*

Letters that are joined over the top and back *a c d e g o q*

Letters that you can join or leave unjoined *b p s x z*

Start joining in easy stages.

It is often necessary to overcome pupils' fear that joining is difficult. There are tricks to overcome this and to let them feel at once the sensation of skimming along with simple joins. One way to do it is to start with the pattern of joined long and short strokes. Then change to one short and two long and there is the word 'ill'. Then progress to hill, hilly etc gradually building up to longer words with the simplest joins. It is rather cheating as you know that there are difficulties ahead with more complex combinations – but it is a start.

It is necessary that pupils should eventually know how to join every letter to every other – but in pairs or short words.

It is also necessary to assure everyone that their standard of writing will not, in the end, deteriorate – that with practice they will improve their script and it will appear much more mature. The most problematic pupils are likely to be those who have been praised for their neat separate letters. An over emphasis on neatness is difficult to overcome.

In the next few pages the different families of joins are analysed separately.



Start joining in easy stages

If you have always printed, then you might like to start by feeling what it is like to write flowing, separate letters. This is the first group of letters with joining strokes at the base *iltuhmnd*.

They will help you to loosen up and change your movement. You can make patterns of these letters-

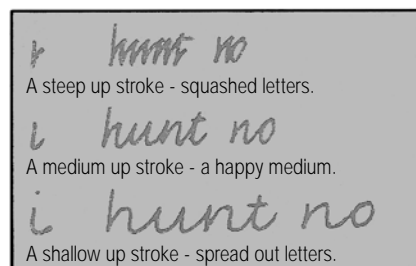
lilll unnn nnnnn mmmmm nnnnn

Try words like 'mill', 'hunt', 'hum', 'hill' and 'nut' using only this group of letters. Write them faster and faster and you will soon find that you are joining up automatically. It is really easy this way.

in my tin hut it hut my hill minimum

Check the joining stroke at the base of your letters.

- 1 If it is too steep and jagged then your letters are too close together and get muddled up.
- 2 If it is too shallow then your writing becomes too spread out. Your joining stroke spaces your letters, so try to find a middle way. Then your writing will look even and be easy to read.



Do not stop in the middle of short words to dot your 'i' and cross your 't'. This is important.

lille little. thun thin.

You should write the whole word without stopping and then you can go back to finish off the bits.

Top joins are great time savers

If you want to demonstrate how joining letters saves time and energy top joins are a great way. Many people who consider that their handwriting is joined do not use top joins. Maybe they have not been taught how, and maybe it is not something that everyone would find out for themselves.

Show someone how to join two 'o's together then let them repeat it several times. It can be one of those magical moments when you make a real breakthrough.

A sentence like '*cook good food from our cookery book*' confirms the joined movement.

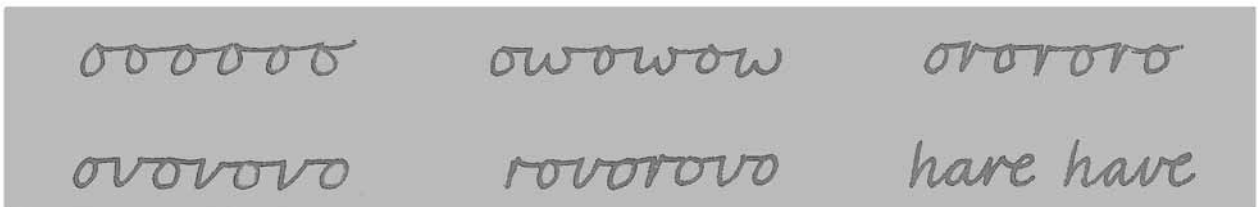
Left handers need a special note here. Some of them find it quite impossible to go anti clockwise around the letter 'o'. The only answer is to leave it unjoined – but it is always worth trying this 'oo' exercise in case it helps them to change.

As you can see from the examples, the top join from the letter 'r' is not always so simple owing to the many personal variations of the letter, nor is the join to the letter 'e'. Sometimes it is better to leave it unjoined. A little experimentation will soon sort that out.

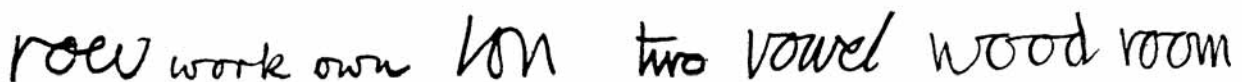


Top joins are great time savers

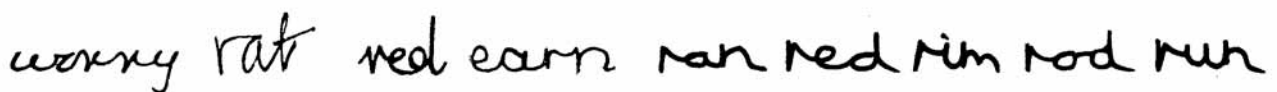
The letters that join from the top are 'o' 'r' 'v' and 'w'.



Scribble a line of looped 'o's to get used to the feeling. Do it faster and faster. Forget about being neat. Now make patterns of the other letters that join from the top. Make sure you can tell 'r' from 'v'.



These words show how top joins vary with different styles of writing.



See what happens in the top of the 'r'.

Practice your letter 'r' before each vowel in turn.



You do not have to join an 'r' to the next letter.

These samples are better left unjoined.

Repairing bad joins.

These examples are self explanatory and would be useful to show to pupils who might have one or more of these faults. Some variations that would have been frowned on in the past are so practical that not only are they ignored but often recommended. An example is joining through the letter 'o' rather than going over the top and back.

Crossbar joins

An infant teacher once told me that the first join that she taught to her reception class was the crossbar join from the letter 'f'. Yet this join is seldom taught in junior school much to the detriment of writers. A simple crossbar join from 't' or 'f' allied to top joins lets the pen speed along smoothly. Try the words 'for' or 'top'.

Writers have to be careful to keep the crossbar along the midline and not to let it wander. After that there is plenty of scope developing personal variations of crossbar joins to suit your own script. A light hearted way to encourage personal joins is to tell the writer not to lift the pen at all, even between words, during a whole sentence. This forces some unusual joins particularly crossbar ones. Try it yourself and make sure there are several 't's and 'f's in the sentence.



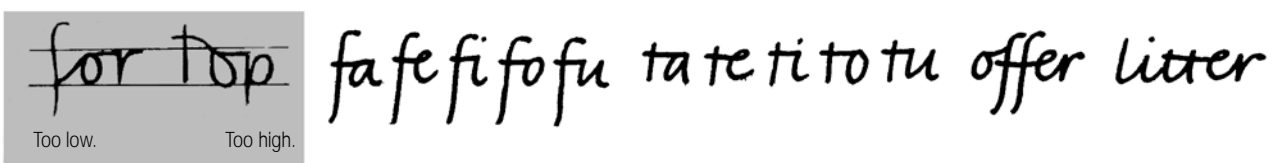
Repairing bad joins

Keep top joins straight. They must not wander up and down.

 <p>Bad joins to tall letters.</p>	 <p>Do not slide over the top.</p>	 <p>Wrong joins muddle words</p>
 <p>Top joins must not droop.</p>	 <p>Joins look like an extra letter.</p>	 <p>Strokes lost in joining.</p>

Crossbar joins

Your crossbar must be at the right height. Not too high and not too low.



the then that for offer for the to the town

Try crossbar joins to each vowel in turn. Then 'th', 'tt' and, 'ff' come next followed by short words.

Joins to the round group of letters

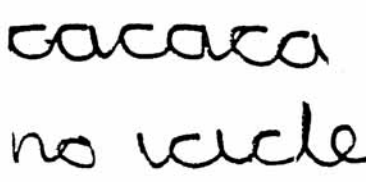
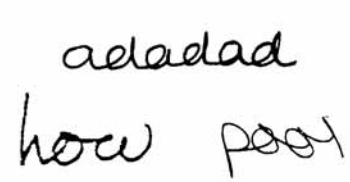
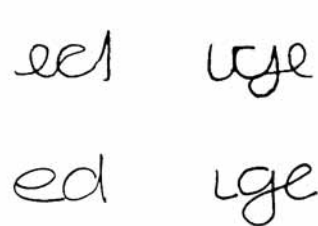
These examples illustrate how much easier it is to join to some letters if you have a narrow slanting script. With very fat letters it is tiresome and time consuming to go right over the top and back again. No wonder many people loop through the round letters instead. In some cases it is better to leave certain letters unjoined.

The letter 's' does not quite fit into the round family. Its only possible partner is 'f'. However it sometimes has joining problems as illustrated by the fat letters shown here. Two of these writers have made an attempt to simplify the letter, but it has not quite worked.

Some girls tend towards this extra wide form. Whether it is just peer group fashion or not it can be exaggerated to the point where it slows the writer and becomes a real nuisance. While not suggesting that you try to alter the proportions of every writer's letters, you could try this experiment. Pupils probably have at least two different ways of dealing with their names. The way they write their name at the top of any piece of work has often not changed for years and is usually relatively immature. Then there is the way they sign their name – when it is needed for official purposes. The written name may be even more childish than their usual script but often the writing contained in the signature is faster, more mature and has a more forward slant. The lesson is obvious. They already have the beginning of an adult script, but there is no guarantee that every teenager will heed it.

Joins to the round group of letters

These joins work best with oval slanting writing. With fat letters the join has to go over the top and back. Try the examples below to see what happens. A penlift may be better than an awkward join.

 <p>Fat letters, uneconomic joins.</p>	 <p>Narrow letters, more efficient joins.</p>	 <p>Round letters, looped joins.</p>
 <p>Good solution to a bad join.</p>	 <p>Keep your 'c's round.</p>	 <p>Some letters are better left unjoined.</p>

see servant glasses as fish is

Do not pull 's' out of shape. Simplify it or do not join at all.

Looping at speed

When writers are relaxed loops from descenders can be an attractive part of their script. When they are tense this is the first stroke to become jagged and distorted. When it has been stressed too strongly that every letter must be joined to the next one you can find wonderful tangles as they try to deal with 'gg'. Another wasted movement occurs when the final descender is unnecessarily looped. There are no definite rules here. It is a matter for experimentation.

Fast personal joins

Personal joins are also all about experimenting. A good way to start is explaining that different forms of a letter are not only permissible but desirable in different positions in the same word. This kind of exercise is successful in a whole class as well as one to one situation. Take the different forms of 'ff'. If several people produce their personal solution and then change paper with their neighbours they may find it impossible to replicate one another's efforts. That is when handwriting becomes interesting.

Half the battle is getting pupils to become engaged and interested in the subject, away from the usual battles over neatness and legibility. Their experiments with personal joins should lead to a maturer and, with luck, more efficient and faster script.



Looping at speed

Some letters will start to loop automatically when you write faster. It often pays to loop a descender at the beginning of a word, and sometimes in the middle. It is a waste, however, to put a loop on a final letter.

jog jog jogging ing

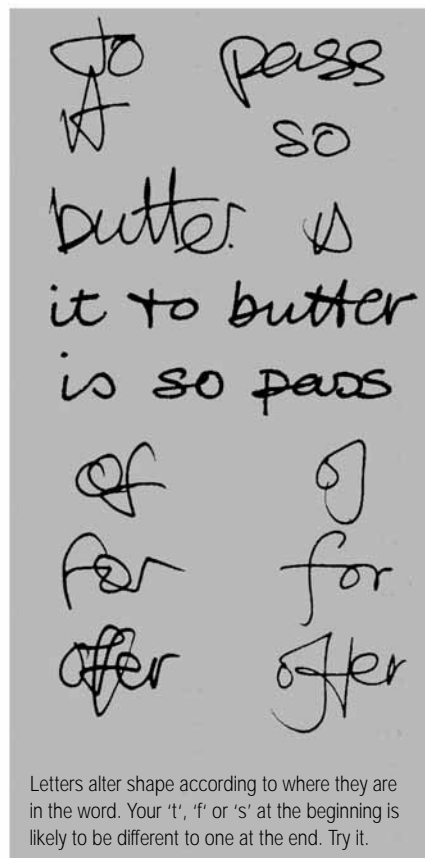
You loop some of your descenders when you write fast, but not the final one.

Fast personal joins

Now your writing is ready to speed up. Your joins are becoming automatic, but you may not always use the same ones. These sets of words on the right will show you why.

You can find one form of a letter at the beginning of a word and another in the middle or at the end. You plan several letters in advance when you are writing fast. The shape of a letter, therefore depends on what was written before and what comes next. Your hand may need a penlift after writing several complex movements. You start again with a simpler letter, so even double letters are not always identical.

This is the kind of variation that makes handwriting interesting.



Letters and joins for left handers

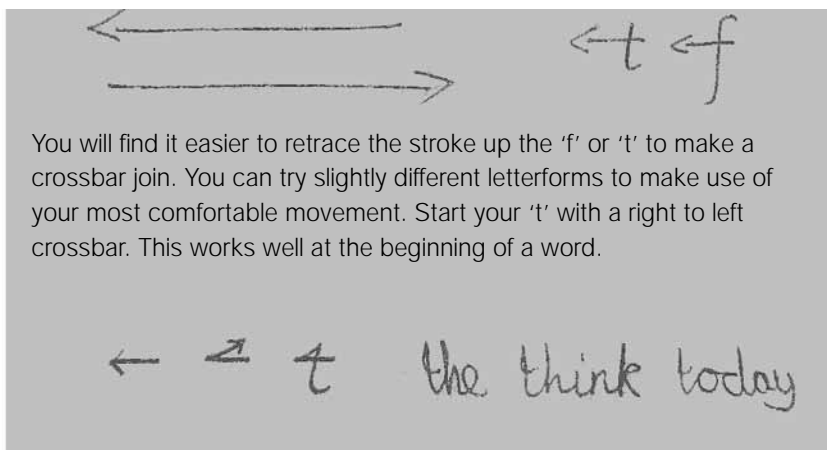
Some left handers show great ingenuity in devising forms that compensate for their natural directionality. This makes it easier for them to proceed from right to left in particular when they make a horizontal stroke. Look at the example below that shows an ingenious way of starting the letter 't' in the initial position. It was devised by a primary school child. The 'ff' in giraffe and the crossbars in the example below it are also interesting. No one had taught them these solutions, but they work. The letters 'f' and 's' can cause problems too as they include a counterchange movement (a change of direction in the middle of a letter). All these examples would give pupils ideas as to for making life simpler for themselves.

Some joins are difficult for left handers and it seems reasonable to suggest that individuals might leave those that distort their writing. That brings us on to something that is not illustrated here. As well as problems with the right to left movement anti clockwise movements can be difficult. It may be almost impossible for some left handers to write the letter 'o' the correct way round. The kindest thing may be to understand that they are not being wilful. As long as they do not try to join from that letter it will neither be noticeable nor disadvantage the writer.

One left handed boy who had severe directional problems was told to slow down in order to make his writing more legible. The trouble was that the momentum involved in writing fast helped his strokes to go in the accepted direction. When he slowed down admittedly his writing was neater but every possible stroke went right to left and clockwise. We can only learn from such pupils.

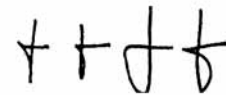
Letters and joins for left handers

Some of the movements involved in writing our alphabet are awkward for left handers. Try this simple test; draw two straight lines in opposite directions. Most left handers find the top one far easier. That is why almost all left handers cross their 'f' and 't' from right to left. Crossbar joins may well feel strange.

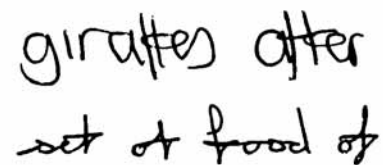


The letters 'f' and 's' can be awkward because they change direction in the middle. Try simplifying them. Experiment until you find something that suits you.

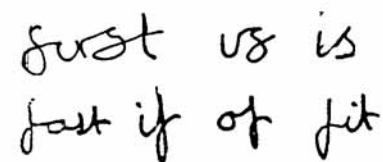
If you have to push uphill to join to round letters you might find it easier not to bother. Lift your pen more often and your handwriting might be easier to read. Changing your hand position can also make things better. See page 27.



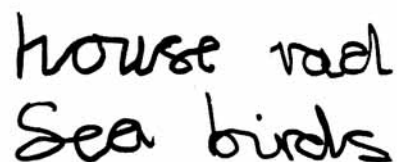
Retrace your stroke then it will be easier to join from the crossbar



left handers find ingenious ways to deal with crossbars. Try these two.



Simplify the letters f and s. This writer made both letters more efficient.



Awkward joins to round letters.

How far can you go with letters?

The first set of examples below include the use of personalised letters such as Greek 'e' or a typographic 'a'. They are getting out of hand at speed. The second set are likely to be the exaggerated result of two different models. The third set is typical of young teenage girls and in the fourth the flourished descenders need to disappear as do the over large loops in the final one.

None of these issues are easy to deal with. Individuals who have developed flamboyant or eccentric letters are probably only reflecting their own characteristics. It may not be the best approach to criticise them but something has to be done. Praise for originality might work but only in the context of suitable usage. As well as being a reflection of the writers' individuality, these forms were perhaps copied from someone they admire or possibly a peer group style. This may be perfectly acceptable in letters to their friends. For formal work they need simplifying for the sake of legibility if nothing else.

A head teacher in a local secondary school once said that she was going to ban circles on the top of 'o's. My reply was that she might as well ban measles. Those circles, as with the other styles below, were a sign of immaturity and, with luck, would disappear as the girls grew up. Let your pupils laugh at the examples and suggest their solutions.



How far can you go with letters?

Keep the basic shape of your letters conventional.

You do not want to have the same writing as everyone else but if you want people to be able to read it easily then you have got to keep within certain limits. As well as the list on page 40 there are other things to watch.

Adults do not read every letter of every word. They scan the general shape of the word, but then they come to a mixture of unusual shapes they have to stop and puzzle it out. Simple letters can be personalised and still be recognisable at speed, but unusual letter shapes cause confusion.

You need to keep the essence of each letter, so do not lose the differences between 'n' and 'u'.

The letter 'i' should have a dot and not a large circle. It can get so exaggerated that they suggest another letter.

Those squiggles that are used to decorate 'g' and 'y' are also best kept for personal correspondence. They may be fun, but distract the reader and make your hand move in the wrong direction. An economical movement looks better and works better too.

Loops can get out of hand and your handwriting can end up looking like knitting.

'a' and 'e' get the worst treatment.

'u' and 'n' arches must look different.

Circles on top of 'i' look silly.

Squiggles are confusing.

Muddled loops. This says 'should at all'.

Fast writing and slow writing

It is important for all pupils to understand the need for different speeds and standards of writing for different tasks. Many people do not realise the effect of writing at different speeds on their script so this exercise can be useful in many ways.

The most efficient writers have already worked this out for themselves, indeed if their script is very efficient, perhaps narrow and slanting, there may be little visible difference when they reach their maximum speed. They are lucky. As special needs teachers your pupils may need more guidance. By asking anyone to perform the simple exercises shown below both they and you will learn. Your pupils' perception of what comprises best handwriting might differ from yours. Sometimes their fastest writing is the most mature, sometimes it is a disaster. Either way it is a good starting point for discussion.

You may also need to discuss when the different levels are most appropriate. Print script need not be derided. It is useful for labelling maps and diagrams, but it becomes tiring on the wrist when written at speed. It can also appear immature. Fast writing is still necessary in order to get enough down in an examination and very fast scribble usually is adequate for notes that only the writer needs to read.

Fast writing and slow writing

This is my very best hand writing.
 the the the the the the
 This is my fastest scribble

This is my 'essay writing'
 my fast writing

This is my best writing, but it takes too long.
 This is my essay writing, it doesn't take as long.
 This is my scribble, I use it for creative writing and it still
 exist fast enough for my thoughts.
 This is my printed scribble, I also use it for creative writing

Your slant, his slant, no slant

The way letters slant is governed by the way the pen is held and this is tied up with the way writers use their body. If someone wants substantially to alter their slant they will have to alter the rotation of their wrist. That sounds complicated but conversely as the slant of letters is consciously altered the wrist would alter automatically. Try it out yourself. This is illustrated and explained more fully on page 27. On page 30 you can see how the alternative pen hold can alter the slant of letters. Changing a left hander from an inverted hand position will do the same, see page 35.

Having said all that there is in fact no particular reason to suggest that anyone should alter the slant of their writing unless it is so extreme that it makes the script hard to read.

When handwriting slants at many different angles that usually indicates a different problem. It is most likely the effect of tension. It is hard to explain but the hand gets jerky and the result is that the regular slant of the writing is disrupted. Difficulty with spelling or grammar can be enough to make the writer hesitate and worry between words. That might be the cause. On the next page it is explained how tension can disrupt spacing. All these factors are linked together, and like everything involved with tension you can help the writer relax, perhaps with the relaxing exercises on page 33 and see the effect. Sometimes these exercises reveal a pupil's natural slant, see page 72. It is much more difficult to ensure whatever you do in a one to one situation will last when the writer is in a tense environment.



Your slant, his slant, no slant

The most practical letters slope slightly forward. Join easily and speed up well. But like everything else, slant is a personal matter.

You need a consistent but not too pronounced angle for efficient legible handwriting. Upright letters may work well for you, but even then you may find that they tilt forward a little when you go really fast.

Many left handers and some right handers have a writing that slopes slightly backwards. This seems to annoy some people but as long as the backward slant is slight and consistent it should not slow down too much or effect legibility. Too much slant, either backwards or forwards, does make writing harder to read. Try to avoid this.

Handwriting that slants in different directions is not only distracting to read but suggests that the writer may be confused too. If your writing is a mixture of backward, upright and forward strokes then try to make your up your mind which slant suits you best. Practice until one angle becomes natural. You can rule yourself some slant-lines for a while to encourage regularity.

Look at page 27. It explains how your hand position can affect the slant of your writing. Change your hand position and you change your slant.

and honey
my smile

Whatever your angle, be consistent.

mainly
on the ist
just seen,
more time

Too much slant either way is hard to read.

The only way to
/ lie awake and
afraid to go to
every night is hell.

A mixture of slants is distracting.

How much space is enough?

There are no definite rules about spacing. It is really a matter of common sense and depends largely on the size of writing. You need enough space to separate words – fat, spread out writing needs more space than small compact writing. This is easy in typography where letterforms are regular and easier to read. There the space is usually the same size as a letter, for instance an ‘m’ for a wide space or an ‘n’ space when you want closer packed text. It is like the space bar on a keyboard.

The two bottom examples below might cause alarm. Why does the girl with the small writing leave such large spaces? There would be rivers of white all down the page making a disturbing pattern. One such writer, when questioned, answered that it was easier to read. She had been criticised because her small writing was difficult to read and this was her solution. On the other hand maybe this girl had been taught to space by using her thumb to measure the gaps between words. It is always worth asking ‘why’ before suggesting possible remedies.

At the very bottom of the page is the kind of script that disturbs me most. Some words are well written, even mature like ‘his’, while others are almost illegible. The hand barely moves sometimes and then jerks and repositions after a huge gap. What deep tension could be causing this? This writer does not need criticism but sympathetic questioning. All these insights into what handwriting is indicating are not making your job any easier. They may, however, help you to understand and assist some of your most troubled pupils.

How much space is enough?

It is difficult to give rules about spacing joined up letters. They must hold together as words but each letter must be separately recognisable. You need to space your words out enough to be able to tell where one ends and the next begins. That is obvious – but how much space is enough? It is common sense.

Large, loosely spaced letters need more space between words than smaller and more compact ones. The space between words varies with the size of the letter and width of joining stroke. That is why it does not work too well when people with tiny writing try to make it more legible by leaving large gaps between words. It only breaks the page up and makes matters worse.

neat print script with joined writing
neat print script with joined writing

The space of an ‘o’ of the same size as the writing is sufficient for print script. For cursive writing, it is safer to say that you need the space of an ‘o’ with enough room for a joining stroke on each side. It is all related to your writing, but when the spaces are too wide white patches all down the page will distract the reader.

Some of you may remember being taught to use a thumb or finger to space between letters. At five years old you may have been told to place it on the paper. Later on you used it as a mental spacer. Forget that lesson. Your thumb has grown with age and your writing has shrunk. Your spaces would be huge.

Most of the i
the only town

Fat writing, wide spacing.

living mainly by fishing.
the only town on the is

Smaller writing, closer spacing.

small island whose inhabi
town on the island als

Small writing, rather wide spaces.

ore and yo
Blut when his
he ren all

Much too wide word spacing.

Spiky letters or round letters

Your handwriting is a mixture of what you were taught and who you are. Who you are is a mix of your character and the way your body works. No style of writing can be judged as being better than any other. In the nineteenth century, for instance, everyone was taught a strict model, and most people's writing remained similar throughout their lives. Even so forceful characters like Nelson or imaginative people like Constable broke free and developed their own personal script.

The two people whose writing is illustrated below are both artists. One of them is left handed. Some people will like one and dislike the other, but they are both examples of good handwriting. Sometimes it is hard to appreciate a script that is very different from your own. Sometimes you know that a certain style is unlikely to develop into a mature and efficient way – but it is seldom a good idea to intervene.

In secondary school pupils are changing and experimenting all the time. Some of these experimental forms were shown on page 48. Some schools believe that exposing pupils to good examples of calligraphy will influence them. Please do not let me discourage you, but teenagers are just as likely to gravitate towards the style of an admired friend or teacher.



Spiky letters or round letters

Why are there so many differently shaped letters and different kinds of handwriting? It is partly because of what we have been taught. There are so many models and each one is what someone at some time decided the ideal letter shape should be. Teachers know that good, clear writing will help a student to get on. They cannot be blamed for trying to get you to write well in the conventional sense. However, many people will not follow a conventional model. A very tense person may also be unable to do so. When it comes to style, what one person admires the next person may hate. That is why this book stresses the need for an efficient personal handwriting and does not suggest any special model.

*also greatly intrigued by the
could not read but liked
would like to know more*

A pointed personal italic.

*non of essays
hed historians
a condensed*

A more rounded cursive.

Our handwriting is also part of what we are like ourselves and how our arm and body works. Quite understandably we like our own kind of writing, though sometimes we might like to be a bit better at it. That is where the problem lies. A son who wants to be an artist or perhaps a footballer, is unlikely to have the same writing as a father who works in a bank. He probably has quite different tastes and interests. A girl who might want to be a hairdresser or perhaps a bio-chemist, will probably be a different kind of person with different writing from her English teacher. One is not right and the other wrong - they are just different.

Mixed up models

However hard they try some children find their school model impossible to follow. Italic handwriting can be efficient, legible and to many people beautiful, and many of those taught italic retain it for life. On the other hand it can be disastrous for some children. The word children is used here rather than pupils because few secondary schools enforce a strict model today.

Italic does not come naturally to everyone, teachers included. Some people perceive and produce its subtle exit stroke as too acute. That zig zag movement can result in an illegible tangle when performed at speed. The pupil who wrote the example below had to be shown that a more naturally curved exit was not only better for his writing but his natural movement. The usual pattern of *ilililil* did the trick.

There may be another unintended consequence of italic. Students can be well taught and come to view italic as a beautiful and desirable style. Some pupils, however, may not have the skill to adapt it to a fast hand. These individuals then suffer later on by neither being able to write fast enough for examination purposes, nor change their perception of what is a desirable script. They may need to become more flexible in their attitude to standards of handwriting for everyday purposes

Mixed up models

There are so many styles taught in our schools that it is no wonder that some of you end up in a muddle.

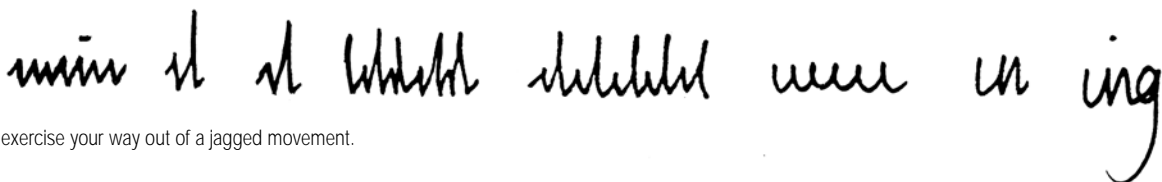
At one extreme there is italic. The word italic is meant to describe oval, slightly slanted, letters. These letters are often taught with a broad-edged nib. This is supposed to make it easier, but with some young children their italic ends up being too jagged. Then it is difficult to read.



This is 'minimum' upside down.



Zig zag writing is difficult to read.



You can exercise your way out of a jagged movement.



Loosen up your letter group by group.



Any style can become exaggerated. Look at your writing with this in mind. Have you ended up with a strange assortment of letters? This can happen to anyone who has had to change schools and models several times. The actual shape of your letters and the different angle of joining strokes can cause uneven writing. Divide your letters into family groups and see if this helps you to sort out a more unified alphabet for yourself.

Some round letters are too round

At the other extreme from italic there are many early models with rounded letterforms. While once again suggesting that it is unwise to criticise a particular style there is no harm in pointing out the problems that sometimes develop. Undoubtedly very round letters are less efficient when joined or written at speed. Then again there is a problem with those pupils, like the first example below, who were so proud of their ability to follow the primary school model that they find it difficult to move forward. They would seldom be criticised for the legible appearance of their writing at any stage, but their script remains rather immature. They are also reluctant to speed up for fear of spoiling their much admired handwriting.

As you can see in the lower examples some rounded letterforms are prone to distort at speed. The open 'b' and 'p' are the worst, but the 'a', 'c' and 'g' family of letters also get dragged open in an attempt to write fast. It is worth drawing a writer's attention to these drawbacks of the model.

You will also come across pupils from abroad who may have had learned quite different styles. They will have enough trouble adjusting to a new educational system without having to alter their handwriting. Some teachers may have difficulty reading their homework but it would be unkind to make too much of it. They may well copy their classmates in time without any outside prompting – if they think it a good idea.



Some round letters are too round

At the other extreme there are rounded, simplified cursive models. They are meant to teach five and six year olds to join up easily. They do this job very well - sometimes too well. Some of these children are left for life with the idea that they must join all their letters all the time, even though their style of letters make it difficult. See also page 45.

This is like the model. Every letter joins. It is clear but slow, and rather childish.

See the awkward joins to 'a', 'o' and 'd'. A pen lift would be quicker than joining.

Some people go back to separate letters when their joins do not work well.

Rounded letters can open out at speed. Narrower writing often works best.

The simplified rounded letters deteriorate at speed. The open 'b', 'p' and 'r' are worst.

Careless writing mixes 'n', 'r' and 'p'.

This open 'p' does not do well at speed.

'b' loses its shape and sometimes looks like 'l'.

Close 'b' and 'p' and dip the top of 'r'.

Large writing and small writing

There are as many misconceptions and misunderstandings about size as any other factor involved in handwriting. First of all, individual pupils may have a completely different concept of size to you. They may not see their writing as particularly large or small at all. Some people associate small with neat, while others think it might be quicker to write small. Neither are particularly true, it is more time consuming to write very small and still retain legibility. The writer of the first small example is a calligrapher and has sufficient hand control to write both fast and legibly, but the second one has sacrificed any attempt at joining in order to appear neat. It requires both great agility and efficient letterforms for small scripts to succeed.

Over large letters present other problems and have different causes. The unfortunate boy who produced the final example had enlarged his writing because his teacher had said that his writing was illegible. He thought making it larger would help. What he needed was some help with the movement of some of his letters. If nothing else, wider line spacing would have helped both the over large writers.

Some of the causes of either over large or tiny writing can be put down to certain characteristics of the writers, but not all. Questions, as usual, are a vital part of understanding, before offering advice.

Large writing and small writing

The size of your writing is a personal matter but there are limits. Small writing must be clear and well spaced or it will be hard to read. Tiny writing can be a sign of tension. Relax and it gets larger. Overlarge writing gets muddled as the lines mesh together.

*It was most pleasant to stay for
dinner. I did enjoy meeting and
talking with your family — not that
I was able to as much as I'd have liked*

island made up of rock formed

Small letters must be clear and well spaced.

*Valleyland at Vienna, was unbrashed unbrashed
in passing the final decisions in their arms
by being least of all the stakes the strike in
was where Spain's justice line*

Complex or careless writing is illegible when small.

*do nothing
busy then a
of without
man. then
me up. took her
his wound*

Try to control the size of your letters so there is space between the lines of writing.

*hours away from
one in preparation for
late week Winston's
flights up and at even
poster of Big Brother is*

Many of these letters are wrongly formed. Making them larger does not make them legible.

Spot your own mistakes

This part of the book is the most suitable for giving out to those pupils who you think will be able to sort out their own problems once they can see where they are going wrong. It is also useful for those pupils who are shy or too defensive to benefit from more direct help at first. As many of these problems have been analysed on previous pages here are some suggestions for useful exercises or sentences for the errors that appear on this page. With wrongly formed letters start with separate letters before progressing to joined up. With the joined typeface used here you would easily be able to type out a relevant letter pattern or sentence. You and your pupils may think of better sentences.

cdcdcdcd adadadad The mad dad cannot add Bad ladders had added to danger
cdcdcdcd adadadad The mad Dad cannot add. Bad ladders had added to danger.

ococococo ooooooo Row row row our boat Cook books to cook good food
ococococ oooooooo Row row row our boat. Cook books to cook good food.

cscscscs cfscfscfscfs Please pass us some sausages She is so sorry she missed us
cscscscs cfscfscfscfs Please pass us some sausages. She is so sorry she missed us.

hphphphp hbphbphbp Top up the penny pot. Tip up Pip's poppy plant's pot
hphphphp hbhbhbhb Top up the penny pot. Tip up Pip's poppy plant's pot.



Spot your own mistakes

Use this last part of the book for fault finding. Skim through the pages and look for samples that show what is wrong with your writing. This will help you to understand your faults. Putting them right will then be much easier.

formed

Wrongly formed letters join badly.

lots to worry
 no more to cp

They get more confused when written fast.

Wrongly constructed letters

 our oa row for

The 'o' goes round the wrong way. Left handers often do this.

oooooo

Correct the movement this way.

 our our row for

wovoto

if special sp sup stop stop bp bp bp stop

This 's' starts at the wrong place. The 'p' starts correctly but then goes mad. It was easy to alter the 's' to start at the top but 'p' took longer.

The 'b' helped 'p' to move properly.

Unevenly sized letters

The writing of the girl who produced the top line of examples is typical of pupils with coordination difficulties. Their hands do not work well enough to manage the complex movement of some letters in the same space the simple ones. Letters such as 's' and 'k' indicate that they are the ones that need simplifying by protruding above the line and giving the script an uneven appearance. Experiment with the different forms: kkk to find which one is easiest then perhaps try this exercise: kkk kkk ckck ckckck Jack kicked the bucket back. You can see that she slightly simplified her 's' straight away. Exercises such as those suggested on the facing page, would help anyone to find the form that suits their script and to realise that there can be different forms in different positions. A full 's' works well in the initial position half 's's work better in the middle. This particular girl made some improvements but she still has some way to go. She needs to close her 'p' and sort out her descenders.

The next two pupils also need help to find satisfactory solutions to 'k' and 's'. They are fast writers and are cutting too many corners.

On the bottom row you will see three different manifestations of uneven letters. The first boy has a script that typifies tension. The jagged strokes and different sizes reflect his problems, The middle writing is distorted by bad joins and possibly joining too much, and the last shows how bad print, involving constant repositioning can result in uneven heights.

Unevenly sized letters

Letters that are different sizes make your writing uneven. They get out of line and distract the reader. The most usual culprits are 's' and 'k'. They are complex letters that have several changes of direction to make in a small space.

 <p>The letters 's' and 'k' are too tall. A less complicated movement will help.</p>	 <p>Simplify them or practice until they work better for you.</p>	 <p>Sometimes bad joins make letters like this 's' stick out, so lift your pen instead. The 'p' needs attention too.</p>
 <p>This writer must slow down. He is going so fast that he cannot control the 's' in the word 'these' or complete the 'k' in 'strokes'.</p>	 <p>Don't cut too many corners at speed. 'better known' reads as 'better brown'.</p>	
 <p>Tension can distort your writing and make your letters vary in size. Relax.</p>	 <p>Bad joins can push your letters out of line. Those to 'o' and 's' are the worst.</p>	 <p>You can get careless about the heights of letters if you do not join.</p>

Where does one letter end and the next begin?

This page is the one that should have the most immediate effect on those whose faults are illustrated here. It should help by making them laugh at the various mistakes. Most of these muddles are caused by pupils who do not join their letters but who think that if they squash them close enough together no one will notice. Most of them still have straight print script letters with no exit strokes. They first need to learn separate letters with exit strokes.

They then could copy the words: coin gang ant loud clock close side and compare with the examples as the exit strokes will automatically space their letters. Then they can try to join up. For 'k's that are falling apart, after seeing if one of the three 'k's on the previous page might suit them better, then they could try the sentence 'Jack is kicking the bucket back'.

Although there are no examples here of actual mirror image there are several that illustrate how similar the shapes of our letters are, so 'cl' easily becomes 'd' and 'lo' can look like 'b'. Should you have a pupil who still confuses 'b' and 'd' these repetitive exercise and sentences that might help them.

bdbdbdbd bad bed bad bed bad bed A bumpy bed is bad but a hard bed is a bad bed too.

Some pupils have never had the opportunity to compare the 'mirror image' letters. It is not only 'b' and 'd'.

b	d	u	n
p	q	h	y



Where does one letter end and the next begin?

Leave enough space between separate letters so you can tell where one ends and the next begins. Good joining strokes will then regulate the spacing for you. Sometimes complex letters like 'k' fall apart making matters worse.

<p>can gang Are these words 'coin' or 'can', 'going' or 'gang'?</p> <p>ant bud Are these words 'ant' or 'art', 'loud' 'lad' or 'bud'? This happens when letters are too close.</p>	<p>clock dose 'clock' or 'dock'? 'close' or 'dose'?</p> <p>badis king 'back' or 'bad is', 'king' or 'icing'? A loose 'k' and tight 'cl' do this.</p>	<p>side 'side down' or</p> <p>clown 'sick clown'? Enlarging handwriting does not solve bad letter spacing.</p>
<p>be her head deep company. A bad start. This writing is squashed together to look as if it joins.</p>	<p>dog tiger good time to Squashed writing gets more confusing as it becomes complex and personal.</p>	<p>also stands on wand town Careless letters make bad spacing more serious. The letters 'ds' could be 'cb' or 'clo'.</p>
<p>pick some up your course Rounded letters overlap and get muddled.</p>	<p>g a jobe breachers Zigzag strokes make a confusing pattern.</p>	<p>was until years of also like pencil Unconventional forms make matters worse.</p>

Are your ascenders too long or too short?

Looking at these two different styles with over-long ascenders you have to wonder how they have come about, A graphologist might have some interesting views! You might have some difficulty curbing the exuberance of someone who writes like the person who produced the top example. The lower writer, with the curly ascenders, reacted well to suggestions that simplification was a good idea. Sometimes practising just one word is enough to sort things out; others may need a sentence or even several sentences.

Try: 'The half full black bottle' or 'I did little but fly back'

It is probably more difficult to make alterations to the lower two examples. Both writers have the usual signs of immaturity in their script and both are making restricted movements with their hand. The first reacted well to the sequence 'itl itl' but you might find that it takes some time before a pupil who writes like this is able to free up her writing to make a marked alteration when engaged in her everyday work.

The same would apply to the last example which has such a definite and truncated movement. First you would need to persuade the writer of the advantages of joining up. For someone with straight letters that terminate with considerable pressure on the baseline it is not easy to relax that pressure and at the same time change direction to add an exit stroke to a letter. This needs to be sorted out before dealing with the differing heights of her letters with appropriate sequences then words.

This pupil is a perfect example of the dangers of teaching children print letters, rather than those with exit strokes. No doubt this writer's script always appeared neat and she may never even have tried to join up.



Are your ascenders too long or too short?

Your ascenders must be long enough for there to be a distinct difference between tall and short letters but not so long that lines of writing get tangled up with each other.

Long ascenders collide with the line above.

Shorter ascenders – more legible writing.

Looped ascenders disrupt the flow of the writing.

A simpler movement – clearer more efficient writing.

Ascenders must not get too short.

Allow for the three heights of letters. The letter 'l' should be taller than 't'.

Short ascenders confuse letters such as 'h' and 'n' or even 'a' and 'd'

These sequences show the difference that adequate ascenders can make.

Are your descenders causing confusion?

By now you will be familiar with the techniques of letter patterns and appropriate words to help correct the common faults. Perhaps it is time to think a bit more about what these different examples are suggesting about the writer. The first line of examples illustrate how abrupt descenders are confusing but do not suggest a serious problem. They might be the result of a misinterpreted italic or other model which leaves a writer with jagged joining strokes. It was easy to show this boy how a more relaxed join resulted in a happier script. He was delighted.

The next three are quite different. These exuberant and exaggerated descenders may be the pride and joy of the writer. It may not be easy to persuade them to change. Depending on any other problems they might have in school, it might be better to ignore the descenders and hope the writers grow out of them.

The bottom three examples are more worrying. Each of these writers have unhappy writing. They all loop the ascender at the end of a word which allied to their ugly descenders makes their writing even worse. Tenseness is distorting all their script, but in different ways. You will be able to do little until you can get them to relax. Then you could sort out the descenders – or with luck they might improve by themselves as body and hand relax. You will be left only to praise the result and then suggest leaving the last letter unlooped. In circumstances like this praise can have a miraculous effect.



Are your descenders causing confusion?

 <p>These descenders join but don't loop.</p>	 <p>This 'g' looks more like a 'q'.</p>	 <p>Loops sort out the confusion.</p>
 <p>Descenders can get out of hand.</p>	 <p>These flourishes just look fussy.</p>	 <p>Larger flourishes get in a tangle.</p>
 <p>These are tense cramped descenders. Try to relax.</p>	 <p>These are too short to loop happily.</p>	 <p>These final letters would be better unlooped.</p>

Dealing with descenders

This page is getting down to the details of the pleasurable activity of redesigning a couple of letters in an otherwise more or less satisfactory script. Most pupils react very positively to this. It is unlikely that the boy whose work is represented on this page was in a special needs group. If you were to have a handwriting club – purely voluntary – this is the kind of activity that takes little time, works wonders and also stimulates others to experiment.

You can see how it worked. First we attended to his 'y' which was at a different angle to the rest of his letters. His separate letter was fine but it did not work so well when joined. Then it became apparent that his 'f' needed help. You can see that he got a bit worried and his writing deteriorated as he tensed up. We went back to separate letters, simplified the 'f' and suddenly it all worked. There were relaxed descenders, a very efficient 'f' and even the 's' seemed to sort itself out. He was delighted and it was only to be hoped that the improvement was lasting. With luck his teachers would notice and praise him for the improvement.

Dealing with descenders

¹
butterfly lays eggs
independently

These descenders are at a different angle to the rest of the writing.

flying high

Try words with several descenders.

y y y y
y g

First develop good separate letters to suit the rest of your writing.

flying high

Repeat until they work well.

ing ing ing
thy thy thy

practice them in groups of letters such as common word endings.

flying high

The f crossbar is still too low.

²
suffer sist

New 'f's and 's' are needed here. These words are meant to be 'suffer' and 'fist'.

energetically

underground

Descenders suffer as the writing get smaller and tenser.

caged

How to design a simpler, well shaped 'g' with the help of its letter family.

g ge age

gave got going

The new 'g' now works well when looped.

sist fist fist

Simplify the 'f'. It should be at the same angle as the other letters.

fig gift

figs figs

What a difference after just a few minutes practice.

Are you leaving strokes out?

This page provides another close look at common faults. A scooped 'u' is a legacy from uncorrected print in the early years. It seems odd that this writer cannot see how both his 'u' and 's' are holding him back. It should be easy to show this particular writer how much more easily his writing will flow for him, and how much better his script will look. That is because some of his other letters are particularly well formed so you can start by praising them. Exercises could be *uy uy* then *up up* and when he has mastered a half 's' perhaps *us us us*. You or he might enjoy working out a better sentence than 'Put up your bus pass'.

Another fault from the same cause is leaving out all the strokes in the rnm group. The pupil may laugh at the wound/around confusion but it may not be so easy to alter all these letters in a not very mature script. The next pupil has the same faults magnified by the attempts to join every letter. They both will need to practice the sequences shown below until the movement feels more natural and they are convinced of its benefit. Then they can try a sentence like 'slamming my door jammed it' or 'winning a running race is fun'. Both of them need to practice in separate letters before attempting to join.

The middle two appear more immature. That certainly does not apply to the bottom example, not that this will make it any easier to deal with. He or she has the same fault but partially covers it up with a mature very fast handwriting and may even think that truncated letters help to speed it up. You will have quite a job persuading this writer of the benefits of alterations. Your best hope would be to avoid the criticism – even though the script is nearly impossible to decipher. Remember, handwriting problems are not necessarily a problem of low achievers, in fact they can have serious consequences for the high flying student.



Are you leaving strokes out?

Letters that have a stroke missing are misleading. You must deal with them. This shows you how.

used much. Just up

This 'u' cannot join properly because the final downstroke is missing.



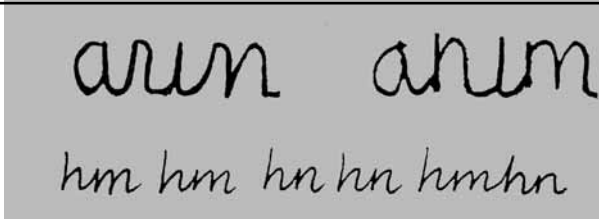
bird char m around

The vital downstroke is missing from 'r'. The word 'around' looks like 'wound'.



animal training

The first stroke is left off 'n' 'm' and 'r' in 'animal training'. The 'm' then looks like 'n'.



may moderate

No downstrokes on 'm' and 'n'. More confusing still with small personal handwriting.



More missing strokes

The examples on this page look more closely at some more of the problems that were listed in the twelve points of legibility on page 40. They show the effects of uncompleted and distorted joining strokes. Letters must be distinctly separated. Melting somehow into the next letter causes wonderful confusion.

The first example shows some adequate joins and then spoils it. Here you could try *ayayay* then the words *way* and *day*. Look at any text that she has written and you will probably find a few other instances of a similar error. Then between you, make up short sentences to include words using those other joins.

The second pupil needs similar treatment. She may be having trouble with other top joining letters as well as 'w'. Try *wnwn* as well as *wnwnw* before a sentence like: 'Our own rowers row very well'.

The next script will need a bit of sorting out. I am sure the girl thinks it very decorative but with an incomplete 'u' which curls over the top of very short descenders it becomes hard to decipher. Her Greek 'd' is quite acceptable at the end of a word. First sort out her 'u' with the usual *uyuyuy* then help her to straighten her l with *ilililil*, and her heights with *itititilt*. 'Little' is a good word for her. It might be more successful for this girl to copy one of her own sentences so she can compare the difference between her reformed writing and her original.

The next pupil does not complete the 'h'. This can be dealt with by the sequences *hnhnhnhn* and *henhenhenhen*. After that she can copy her own sentence starting: 'when she brushed her hair'.

The final pupil has got to learn to complete the letter 'a' before proceeding. Try *alalal* before *atatat* and 'the cat sat on the mat'.

More missing strokes

away days

A stroke is missing between 'a' and 'y'.

day day ✓
uy uy ay ay way day

was flour

'w' without a space or a joining stroke looks like 'u'.

own own
wowo wnwn wawa

out wand

Incomplete 'u' joins badly making 'out' and 'would' illegible.

and ould
uy uy ulul utut ulul

when she brushed

Unfinished 'h' slides carelessly into the next letter.

hed hed
hnhnhn hnhe hehehehe

cat sat on mat

Sloppy a without proper downstroke looks like 'o'.

at at
alalal aalal aooao



Exit but not entry strokes

So far this book has not commented on the many different handwriting models in use in our primary schools. The only factor mentioned has been the advantage of separate letters with exit strokes over the straight, abrupt letters of print script. However, recently there has been a fashion for reverting to using entry stroke such as still taught in America. You can see below what happens if anyone who has been taught to use entry strikes takes a pen lift in the middle of a long word, something that is necessary with modern writing implements. Here letters that join from the top like 'o', 'r', 'v' and 'w' are not meeting up with letters that start on the baseline. The last letter of the letter sequences looks like a bad join from an 'a' but is actually 'ori'.

Apart from being more complex to learn it must be more time consuming to write the extra stroke. The only argument in its favour is that it is good for those with complex learning difficulties to start every letter on the baseline. For that reason alone all other pupils are disadvantaged. It certainly is not an aid to joining up, and it is easy for nearly everyone to understand that all letters start at the top except 'e' and 'd'.

The samples below are from relatively mature writers. The first one is faking the entry strokes and must have come from a very strict school where there was criticism for anyone who did not follow the school model – or he or she just thinks it clever. The last writer was delighted to be rid of his entry strokes, and you can sense it in his script.



Exit but not entry strokes

This page shows why letters with entry strokes are inefficient and only lead to trouble. It is a pity that they are still taught. Some letters finish at the base line, these will join to entry strokes. Other letters finish at the top, This is where it all goes wrong.



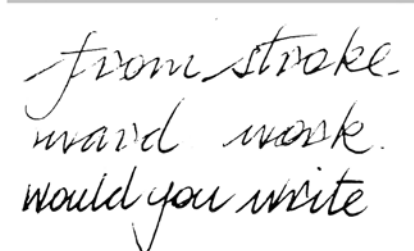
An entry stroke.

An exit stroke.

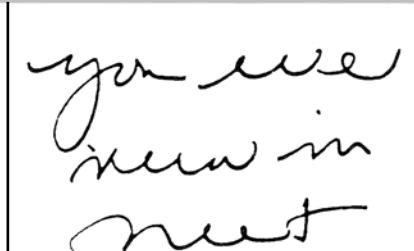
A high exit joins.

An entry stroke overlaps.

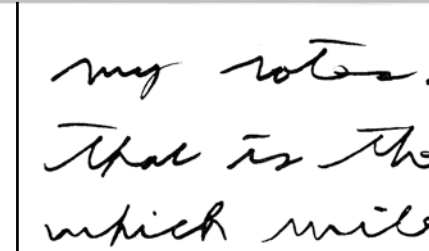
Confusion when they touch.



Inefficient entry strokes that do not flow or join properly.



Entry strokes gone mad. This says 'you ever run in' and 'meet'.



Entry strokes pull bad writing even more out of shape.



It is never easy to change a writing habit. This pupil discards entry strokes then can enjoy efficient top joins.

Exit strokes: a recipe for disaster

Once a child has been taught that an entry stroke is an integral part of a letter, like any other aspect of handwriting, it becomes an automated habit and is difficult to alter. You can see that entry strokes caused similar problems a hundred years when the pointed quills or nibs and the copperplate writing made entry strokes necessary. Then, the entry stroke helped to get the ink to flow. It was not a good idea to stop in the middle of a word because most likely an ink blot would be the result. The hand rested lightly on the desk so that it could move easily along the line during long words.

The examples below are written by pupils who are not very competent and their script is distorted by entry strokes. The first one has problems with the joining stroke after 'r'. The next one uses an entry stroke mid word and overlaps the exit stroke. When the letters are wrongly formed in the first place the result is disastrous. The unfortunate pupil on the bottom line would have to go right back to the beginning with his letters. It is really unfair to burden such pupils with unnecessary complexities, and most view simpler letters with great relief. Sometimes it is just a matter of being given permission to drop something that they have been made to do, and always found difficult.

For competent writers the problem will always be that entry strokes make it more difficult, in the end, to join up, not less. If the primary schools that promote such models could see the results of their teaching they might rethink their policy.



Exit strokes: a recipe for disaster

Entry strokes confuse when you change from separate letters to joined up.



care for these cars a red petrol
 fiends travel around they are

tittle

100 years ago entry strokes caused trouble. They still do if you stop to dot your 'i' or cross your 't'.

Peedled
 Military,

Entry strokes overlap but do not join when you stop and start in mid-word.

little little ho
 butter butter
 little little lit

Forget entry strokes. Wait to the end of short words to dot your 'i's and cross your 't's.

determine which is
 which averages
 against the price
 need lodestone

Entry strokes on wrongly formed letters make matters worse.

finish
 bars

'i' and 'r' push up from the base. Mock entry strokes make 'j' curve backwards.

in in in
 runin

Start 'i' at the top and omit the entry stroke for efficient joins.

Capital letters: last but not least

There is not much more to say about capitals than is said below. People in some professions write entirely in stylised capital letters. For architects and some designers it is a sort of trademark. For those with trained hands this might work, but for others the constant repositioning will always be a problem. Some therapists seem to think it might be better for their patients, for some reason. Maybe it is what they consider easy for infants, but even then repositioning the pencil is difficult. Modern capitals are not meant to join. You can see what it does when writers using entry strokes try this. Capital letters are fair game for those who want to elaborate their script, as long as it does not go too far, but they should be discouraged from using them in the middle of word however attractive they may think it is. Most likely it is a passing phase and the writer will soon tire of it.

By the time that you have read this part of the book you will understand why there are not pages of photocopiable exercises. The secret of dealing with older children and their problems is in the diagnosis, the explanation. Short relevant letter sequences are usually enough to help the writer to understand what is needed. They should provide quick results without boring or discouraging anyone. The corrected letters may not transfer at once into general writing because it might slow writers down too much to be thinking of specific letters all the time instead of the content of their work. However, if you have succeeded in persuading them that it is all to their advantage to alter, and perhaps got them interested in something that has always seemed a tiresome chore, then in the end they will change.



Capital letters: last but not least

Use capital letters for emphasis and accuracy. Keep them distinctive.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

G SE Briem's alphabet shows the open proportions of classic capital letters.

ELEVEN TWELVE COME HERE QUICKLY.

Capitals fall apart at speed. They start to join and soon deteriorate. Some initial capitals make legible, economical joins to the next letter – but not all.

<p>to need com for board trade</p> <p>Avoid capitals in the middle of words.</p>	<p>Dear Sir, Sir She Year Er</p> <p>Joins pull sloppy capitals out of shape.</p>	<p>The France on Roman Em Spanish Pope</p> <p>Some join – some do not in a fast hand.</p>
<p>The Top Top To The Uf</p> <p>You can join 'T' to 'h' but not to short letters.</p> <p>Do not join 'T' or 'l' from the base.</p>	<p>Let Guide The Spiro</p> <p>Separate capitals look better here.</p>	<p>An Do So Of</p> <p>Joins like these can save time, but do not let them get out of hand.</p>